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Everglades deal: rejoice, don't snipe

Thom Rumberger
My View

Last week we became historic witnesses to what once seemed remote and unimaginable. Immediately a few uninformed critics began trying to spin our brightest moment into something dark and cynical.

Those of us who have devoted decades to reversing the devastation visited upon the nation's Everglades dared not even dream any longer that this day might come.

Yet in the mind and heart of every lover of the Everglades this was the one great, perpetual wish: To buy back as much land as possible for the restoration of the Everglades.

And then, incredibly, there we stood Tuesday upon that very land in the Everglades as Gov. Charlie Crist, U.S. Sugar CEO Robert Buker and South Florida Water Management District Vice Chair Shannon A. Estenoz took the stage.

In his clear and purposeful way, the governor announced the state's planned purchase of 187,000 acres of the most ecologically critical real estate in the hemisphere.

The purchase will directly benefit millions of residents of South Florida, providing clean water through a replenished aquifer. It will benefit the dwindling populations of birds, endangered species, and all other wildlife. And above all this purchase will hasten the hour when the toxic streams of farming-related pollution that now course corrosively through the Everglades' delicate web of life will become but a murky memory.

We were aware that discussions leading up to the announcement were under way as long ago as November and so we are more than a little troubled by some severely misinformed critics who have pounced on the governor's move as some sort of political stunt.

People should ignore the sniping. First, it's important to allow us a chance to enjoy this uniquely nonpartisan moment. Secondly, many supporters of the Everglades have given political support and contributions to both Republicans and Democrats.

The hundreds of environmental groups, attorneys, individual citizens and government officials who have contributed to this moment — especially our forward looking South Florida Water Management District lead by Chairman Eric Buermann and Executive Director Carol Ann Wehle — deserve more than seeing their hard work drowned out by political opportunists.

Those political long knives who suggest the governor announced the land purchase to improve an undeclared shot at becoming a vice presidential running mate, or to deflect scrutiny of his current call for a reasoned look at whether our changing geopolitical world requires reconsidering our state's traditional opposition to drilling for oil in the Gulf, are in need of a serious reality check.

The conversation over the purchase of this land began eight months ago and the announcement was made this week because it was ripe for announcing. And what better time than when the state's environmental groups, the water-management district, and news media are present? I firmly believe the Everglades announcement would have been made by the governor — regardless of any talk or absence of talk about drilling. So could the cynics remind me again what the rational connection is? Here is mine: coincidence of timing.

Sometimes when courageous legacy building steps are taken by a bold policymaker eager to deal with the new realities in ways to benefit every single one of us, the graceful response is appreciation, praise, or humble silence.

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